14. STRANGE DEATH OF A SNAKE

On May 27, 1999 while watching grizzled giant squirrels (*Ratufa macroura*) in Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary, I saw a dead snake lying entangled among the branches of a tamarind tree. At my request, the 'Hill Pulaya' accompanying me climbed the tree and brought the snake down. It must have been dead for at least a couple of weeks and was absolutely dry. Stuck in its mouth was a large *Calotes calotes,* about 40 cm in length (including tail) that had been almost completely swallowed. The hot dry climate of Chinnar — in May, day temperature reaches 38 °C — had mummified the snake and its prey.

The snake was identified as *Dendrelaphis tristis* (Family Colubridae). Its total length was 78 cm. The lizard could be seen clearly through the tautly stretched skin of the snake's neck region. Even the white bands on the lizard's green body were visible through the snake's stretched skin. The 20 cm long tail and the hind legs of the lizard were sticking out of the snake's mouth. The snake and its prey were remarkably undamaged. Two claws of the lizard's hind limb were stuck in the corner of the snake's mouth, and probably during its effort to regurgitate the prey, the claws of its right forelimb also penetrated the snake's gullet and skin, resulting in the death of the snake.

Behura (*JBNHS 50(1)*: 183) mentions a *Xenochrophis piscator* dying in a pond as a result of 'swallowing a 8.1 inch long fish' and probably getting the pectoral spines of the fish stuck in its mouth, so that it could not be swallowed or regurgitated. Snakes rarely choke to death on prey, for they can extend their wind pipe along the floor of the mouth to breathe during feeding, and also, they seldom tackle animals too big to swallow.

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15. SIZE ANALYSIS AND DISTRIBUTION OF JERDON'S BULL FROG *HOPLOBATRACHUS CRASSUS* (JERDON 1835) IN ASSAM

Hoplobatrachus crassus, a close relative of *H. tigerinus* (Family Ranidae), was recently reported from northeastern India by Bordoloi and Bora (1999). Earlier, the easternmost limit of distribution of *H. crassus* was West Bengal (Sarkar *et al.* 1992). It is possible that previous workers confused the two congeners and failed to record the former from parts of its range (Daniel 1975). The present communication deals with the distribution of *H. crassus* in Assam and provides a comparison of morphometric features of these two species.

Specimens of *Hoplobatrachus crassus* and *H. tigerinus* were collected using visual encounter surveys. A total of 73 man-hours were spent in collecting 23 adult (15 ♂ and 8 ♀) *H. crassus* and 49 adult (27 ♂ and 22 ♀) *H. tigerinus* during the breeding season (April to September, 1998). The date and time of collection, habitat and microhabitat, and weather conditions were noted. Each specimen was measured for morphometric analysis. Statistical analysis (t tests) were carried out.

Hoplobatrachus crassus has a wide distribution in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, up to an altitude of 180 m above msl. It is most abundant in the flood plains, especially in waterlogged agricultural fields. Of 23 specimens collected, 12 were from paddy fields, 5 from wet grasslands, 3 from sugarcane fields, 2 from oxbow lakes locally known as *beels* and one from a moist open field with short broad-leaved grass. It was found on both banks of the Brahmaputra river: Sibsagar, Golaghat, Kamrup, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darang, Sonitpur and Lakhimpur.